

We have been affected by the North Dakota High School Activities transfer ineligibility rule twice now. Our older son left home to play hockey at a private school/hockey academy. He left for his sophomore year in 2019/2020. He played bantam as a freshman so he was not a part of our high school program at all. As we all know, COVID shut everything down so he came home in March of 2020 not knowing what the following season would bring. Things were still up in the air as the spring and summer progressed so we started the steps for him to play high school hockey at home.

When we signed off to transfer him out, our principle made no mention of the penalty upon returning to town so we were surprised and terribly disappointed to find out that he was ineligible to play varsity as a Junior in high school. He had worked so hard. We sent many emails to the North Dakota High School Activities Association pleading our case. The Canadian league was not playing in 2020 so he would not have been able to play up there even if he would have returned. He would have been isolated to campus and limited to his school and classmates. We would have had very limited access to him as the border was closed. Even after explaining all of this our requests were denied.

We appealed and were granted a meeting. I asked how I should prepare and I was told I would just be sitting in on a meeting. We drove 4 hours in a storm for a 12 minute meeting in Valley City where a room full of [board members](#) stared at us. I was asked to present my case in front of the entire group. It was humiliating. I had no idea I was presenting. I was nervous and stumbled over my words. I was a mom having to defend my choice for doing what was best for my child during COVID. One of the board members asked, "So do you have other kids that play hockey?" I said I did. "Oh really? Where?" They already knew our next son was at a prep school in Winnipeg. I knew we were sunk.

Later that week, we found out our son was denied his exemption and had to play JV. The look on his face as he watched his peers through the glass was heartbreaking. He could have contributed to their season, which was one of the best in recent school history. He was embarrassed to walk through the lobby in his suit because he didn't want people to think he was not good enough to make varsity. By the end of the season it had really started to wear on his mental health.

To make things even more confusing, we found out that a girl from Fargo had left her high school to play in Minnesota. The announcers covering her games kept acknowledging how she left home to improve her skills and bring that back to her high school, just as our son had done. Her team was playing for a state title and she was a leading scorer. I emailed [Matt Fetsch, NDHSAA Executive Secretary](#), about this and after a week or so he responded that he could not discuss her case with us. I

thought maybe they had finally seen the light and changed the transfer rules so they were no longer harming these innocent kids. We were so happy for this young lady getting to do exactly what we had hoped our son would be allowed to do. We hoped that this could be the case for other children in the state too. We wanted to understand how her parents had navigated the system while we were struggling to make sense of it all and our child was paying the price. Since then, we have learned of many more North Dakota high school athletes that have circumvented this rule and many others that were denied the opportunity to play as well.

Our next son has been recruited by a hockey academy since he was 10 years old. He was chosen as the only import on Team Manitoba and did very well. This opportunity was opened to him when he entered high school. After much discussion about what we already went through, he made the decision to go. He was never enrolled in high school here in Bottineau and never played hockey locally beyond bantams. He played U15 and U16 in Winnipeg and was an assistant captain. Tryouts for the U18 team did not go as well as he hoped and he was left without a place to play so he returned home.

We started the conversation again with the Executive Secretary. He responded with a copy of the rule with the line about having an address in that district highlighted in yellow. We knew from our previous experience with this organization, that having an address in the new team's district was required. In order to satisfy that requirement, we submitted a 1 year lease for a condo in Winnipeg and an email from the U18 coach stating that he did not make that team. When our son did not make the team we had no reason to continue with the lease and he returned home to start school with his friends. Later, the Executive Secretary called our AD. He said the NDHSAA would not accept our son for varsity play because of 'dual residency'. This was mentioned NOWHERE in the [NDHSAA bylaws](#). The NDHSAA returned a copy of these bylaws with their interpretation of the rules added below the original wording. Again, not posted anywhere on their site. Our kids are dual citizens (US and Canada). They should not be punished for this or for chasing opportunities and trying to better themselves through experiences they will remember for a lifetime.

I hear all of these ads on the radio saying how important high school sports are and it makes me angry to realize that these ads don't apply to everyone. This year has been terribly frustrating because our son has played at an elite level for 8 years with the best skaters in the US and Canada. I'm not bragging, that's just what he has been blessed to do. Playing JV this year has been a setback for him athletically and emotionally. Opposing parents and coaches have expressed frustration and confusion, the opposing players are wondering why he is playing JV only. If they don't care about the rule, why should the NDHSAA? Let them play! It makes no sense for kids to miss out on this short window of time in their lives to satisfy this rule. These kids

should not be punished for pushing themselves to be great, but that is exactly what NDHSAA is doing.